



# Columbia University

- Accepted College Essay -

## POWER OF PEOPLE

I believe in people. This conviction drives my action and ambitions, and defines me in a world of cynicism and doubt. I have seen the power of people and their ability to come together in times of need and joy and sorrow. I know that ultimately, humans strive for belonging and community; thus, while loneliness and anger may always be in existence, so will be togetherness and bliss. My strong faith in humanity stems from my witnessing of the best in human qualities while doing the MS150 and during Hurricane Ike, and pushes me to pursue a career in helping others. Both of these events have allowed me to see humanity at its best, performing selfless acts of benevolence.

For the past four years, I have participated in the BPMS150 bike tour from Houston to Austin. This 175 mile ride raises funds for the national MS Society, which sponsors medical research for multiple sclerosis and aids the families of its victims. I can say from experience, the ride is grueling; enormous hills, headwinds, fatigue, and body aches are prevalent throughout. Yet every year, over thirteen thousand riders decide to put their minds and bodies through two days of torture so that they can help those who live with it every day. I have raised, over four years, more than eight thousand dollars to benefit the MS Society, and have never regretted any of the painful training or the ride itself. The view at the starting line is one of the most empowering I have ever witnessed: thousands of people, all of them with their hands on their handle bars, one foot poised on a pedal. All are ready to experience exhaustion for the benefit of others, like my father. He was diagnosed with MS when I was four, and is a constant motivator for me. I witnessed him become blind in one eye, and struggle with a body that refuses to function normally. I participate in this ride every year for him, as do thirteen thousand others. The power of people will ultimately help my father to receive better medical treatment, and maybe even one day, be cured.

While writing this essay, I was also able to observe and be a part of amazing human efforts. Hurricane Ike devastated Southeastern Texas, particularly the Houston and Galveston areas. Much of my extended family lives in Galveston, and so was forced to evacuate. Without hesitation, my parents opened up our home to aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and pets. This is the environment in which I have always lived; our home is anyone's shelter; our food is anyone's nourishment. Together, our entire family weathered the storm, and comforted one another. My aunt's home received electrical power prior to my home, and so she eagerly welcomed us to stay with her. Large scale displays of altruism could be seen in the hundreds of University of Houston students handing out food and water to those affected by the hurricane. During times of need, people band together for safety and solace. Community is instinctual; dismiss the notions of survival of the fittest. People truly desire closeness with one another.

In the future, I hope to pursue a career in public health. I love studying science and math, and I would like to use this passion to benefit large numbers of people. Many go without basic medical treatment, and this causes a huge discrepancy in quality of life and health in the population. Even if this problem can never completely be solved, I want to help remedy this as much as possible. With small deeds and cooperative effort, humans can accomplish immense good. I know this because I believe in people, and I have seen them at their finest.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

As I sat at a table in the corner of a cafe, hunched over a press release I was writing, I asked myself, “Why is a youth advocate from Long Island, halfway around the world in South Africa this summer, debating issues of sustainable development at a United Nations conference?” I needed to meet a deadline for the Youth Caucus at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) after an exhausting but exhilarating day of lobbying. My goal was to help persuade world leaders at the largest United Nations conference in history that pursuing sustainable development is essential for the future of our planet. Because I had attended a previous UN conference about children’s rights, I understood the importance of sustainable development in this context. Then, I was chosen to represent SustainUS, a national network of American youth, at the WSSD. I raised all of the money needed for my trip. I was thrilled to witness the human spirit in its purest sense, taking collective action to care for the less fortunate around the globe.

It was one thing to debate language in the conference document about goals set to provide people in developing nations with access to water. It was quite another to visit Soweto, only a few kilometers away from the conference, and to meet poor Africans living in shanties with limited access to water. This observation embedded in my mind the seriousness of my work in a way that no statistic could describe. The challenge on paper seemed quite different from the harshness of Soweto and Alexandria and the long-suffering faces and pleading eyes of the beggars there. I reminded myself that I needed to work around the clock while I was in South Africa to help these impoverished people.

After arriving in Johannesburg this past August, I traveled to the International Youth Summit. I drafted the youth declaration which was used for lobbying, and I helped to write a statement from the youth delegates for government representatives to read and consider while negotiating. While at the WSSD, aside from writing daily press releases that became Associated Press and Reuters articles, I drafted speeches which were presented to the delegates, including over one hundred heads of state. I experienced an adrenaline rush when I fielded questions from reporters during a press conference. These challenging situations were new learning opportunities for me and provided me with knowledge much different from what one learns in high school. I want to learn more about the histories of international financial institutions and the ways they interact with national governments.

As a result of my attending the World Summit, I have gained a new perspective on global politics and its effects on people’s lives. The thought that people from around the world can join together to solve a global issue never fails to impress and inspire me.

My participation in the WSSD has taught me more about the convergence of politics, international relations and the environment than I have learned in any other activity or in the classroom. Working with others to reveal the crucial need for sustainable development is essential to our world’s successful future. All of my experiences have helped me to understand how international meetings operate and to accept the responsibility that comes with the privilege to attend and contribute to the solution.

# Envision High

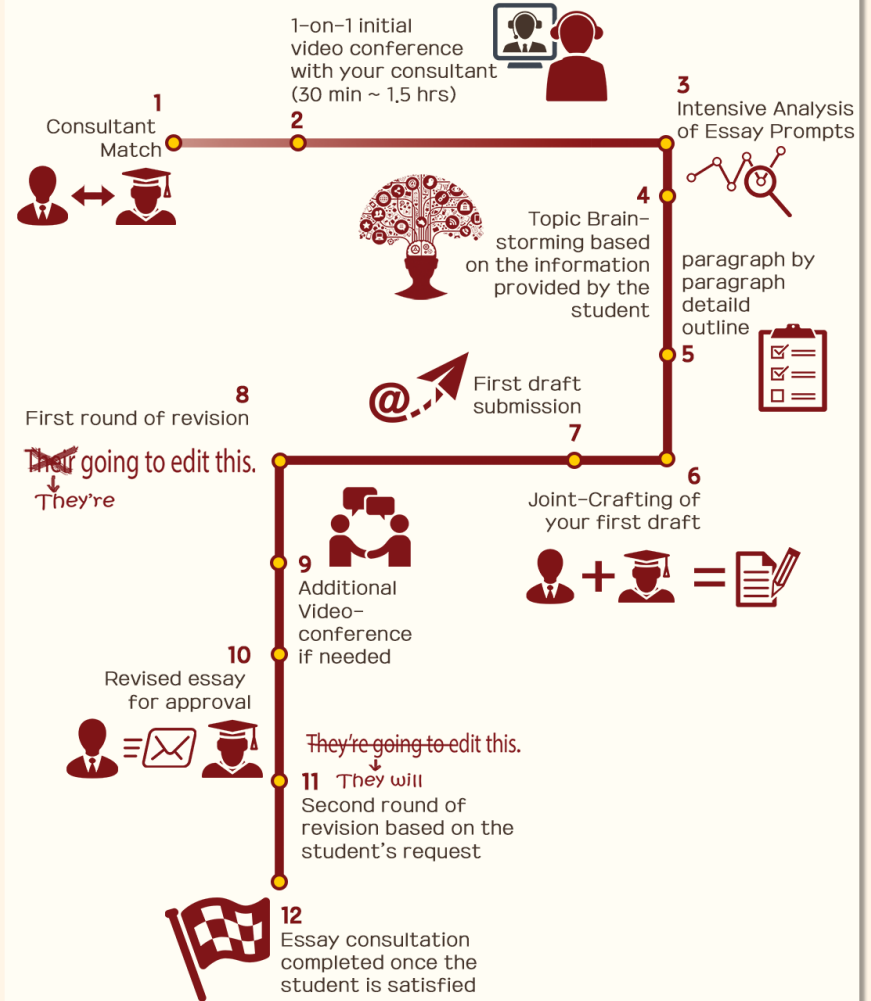
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